

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6325
INFO AMCONSUL MONTREAL
AMCONSUL QUEBEC
ALL OTHER CANADIAN POSTS POUCH

C O N F I D E N T I A L OTTAWA 00771

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, CA
SUBJECT: LEVESQUE WALKS OUT OF ECONOMIC SUMMIT

REF: OTTAWA 729

1. IN A DRAMATIC HOUR-LONG PRESS CONFERENCE EARLY THIS AFTERNOON (FEB 15), QUEBEC PREMIER LEVESQUE STARTLED NATION-WIDE TV AUDIENCE BY ANNOUNCING HE WAS WALKING OUT OF ECONOMIC SUMMIT INVOLVING TRUDEAU AND OTHER PROVINCIAL PREMIERS. LEVESQUE ARGUED THAT HE HAD COME TO OTTAWA PREPARED TO COOPERATE WITH HIS PROVINCIAL COLLEAGUES AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IN SOLVING COUNTRY'S ECONOMIC PROBLEMS, BUT SOON CONCLUDED THAT CONFERENCE WAS ESSENTIALLY A "PRE-ELECTORAL EXTRAVAGANZA" BY FEDERAL LIBERAL PARTY. HE CHARGED THAT TRUDEAU AND HIS MINISTERS HAD PAINTED AN UNREALISTICALLY ROSY PICTURE OF THE CANADIAN ECONOMY AND HAD DEMONSTRATED LITTLE WILLINGNESS TO DEAL WITH IMMEDIATE PROBLEMS AFFECTING LIVES OF QUEBECKERS AND OTHER CANADIANS. HE WAS EXCEPTIONALLY HARSH IN CRITICIZING FEDERAL URBAN
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AFFAIRS MINISTER OUELLET FOR ALLEGEDLY HOLDING UP FUNDS FOR HOUSING PROJECTS IN QUEBEC. INTERTWINED IN LEVESQUE'S COMMENTS WAS HIS VIEW THAT CONFERENCE HAS DEMONSTRATED AGAIN PRESENT SYSTEM OF CANADIAN FEDERALISM IS A FAILURE. AT SAME TIME, HE WAS CAREFUL TO STRESS THAT HIS WALK-OUT WAS DIRECTED TOWARDS FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND NOT TOWARDS OTHER PROVINCIAL PREMIERS WHOM

HE GENERALLY PRAISED FOR THEIR CONSTRUCTIVE ROLES IN THE CONFERENCE.

2. COMMENT: IF, AS MANY OBSERVERS WOULD AGREE, ECONOMIC SUMMIT WAS PARTLY "A PRE-ELECTORAL EXTRAVAGANZA," THEN IT IS EQUALLY FAIR TO SAY THAT LEVESQUE'S DRAMATIC PRESS CONFERENCE THIS AFTERNOON WAS A KIND OF PRE-REFERENDUM EXTRAVAGANZA. HIS OPENING STATEMENT, WHICH HE READ IN FRENCH, WAS OBVIOUSLY DESIGNED TO IMPACT ON THE QUEBEC AUDIENCE, PARTICULARLY TO BOLSTER HIS CASE AGAINST CANADIAN FEDERALISM AND, INDIRECTLY, FOR SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION. (CONSULATE GENERAL QUEBEC WILL REPORT REACTIONS IN THE PROVINCE TO LEVESQUE'S MOVE.)

3. TRUDEAU, ON OTHER HAND, WILL UNDOUBTEDLY ARGUE THAT HE AND OTHER NINE PROVINCIAL PREMIERS WERE ABLE TO AGREE ON WAYS--MODEST THOUGH THEY ARE--TO IMPROVE STATE OF ECONOMY AND THAT THIS FACT DEMONSTRATES FEDERALISM DOES WORK. OUR PRELIMINARY VIEW IS THAT THIS ARGUMENT WILL CARRY MORE WEIGHT IN ENGLISH-SPEAKING CANADA THAN IN QUEBEC.
ENDERS

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